

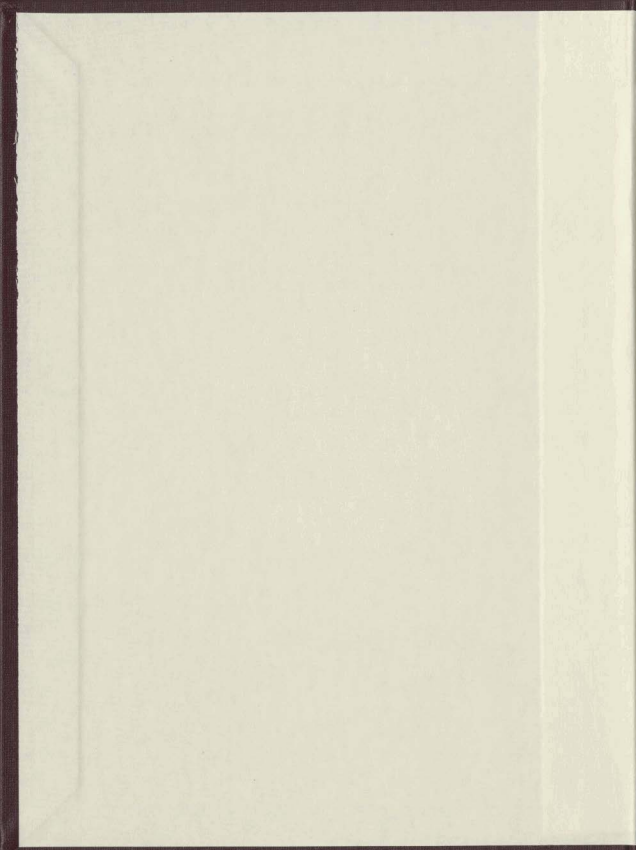
PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH THE NEWFOUNDLAND
AND LABRADOR KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH THE
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12 PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

BY

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Abstract

A telephone survey of 846 Newfoundland and Labrador adults (329 with children currently in school, 228 with children who had already left the school system, 283 who had never had children in school and 6 who were parents of preschool children) was conducted to determine their level of satisfaction with the Kindergarten to Grade 12 public school system. *An overall measure of satisfaction was created using four indices: level of confidence that Newfoundland schools are as good as other schools; perceived quality of elementary schools; perceived quality of high schools; and a comparison of schooling in the province today to schooling as it was ten years ago.* Using this overall measure of satisfaction, it was shown that most respondents were satisfied with the Newfoundland K-12 school system. Satisfaction was not related to parental status. While demographic variables such as age, gender, annual income and parental status were not related to respondents' satisfaction with the system, education was shown to be a factor in determining overall satisfaction. Satisfaction was also influenced by whether respondents *thought schools were: achieving the main priority of schooling; placing proper emphasis on course curricula; and, adequately dealing with the problems facing today's schools.*

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In private enterprise under competitive conditions, there is some direct feedback from the appropriate public when people exercise their discretionary power as consumers to purchase from one or another competing source. In private monopolies and public agencies, there is no such direct check on products or services. In such cases the need for systematic feedback from the people being served is all the more necessary.

Katz, Gutek, Kahn & Eugenia (1985, p. 2)

Education is a partnership that involves not only students and teachers but also parents, employers and the community at large. Each of these groups has its own ideas, beliefs and biases about education and its role in society. Thus, these groups will likely have different expectations for the education system and perceptions of the system could vary significantly among them (Banfield, Perry Fagan & Bulcock, 1994). Government officials and policy makers have long recognized the need for gaining public support when implementing new ideas or attempting to change current traditions or policies. Therefore, it is important for policy makers to determine what various groups expect from the system and to determine if any given group has specific biases regarding certain educational issues. Stakeholder approval or disapproval is, quite often, the determining factor when it comes to making decisions that may have an impact on those groups with a vested interest.

Although there has been increasing interest in the viewpoints of stakeholders and despite the general recognition of the importance of stakeholder approval when making key decisions, the input of many stakeholder groups is still often less than what it could be. One increasingly important group of stakeholders within the education

system is the parent community. Within education, parents seem to have been neglected by school officials when considering new programs, practices or policies. As a result of this lack of parent inclusion in decision-making processes, very little research has focused on parents' attitudes or satisfaction with their local schools or with their children's schooling in general. Recently however, parents have demanded more input in their children's schooling (Reynolds and Gill, 1994) and as result, this stakeholder group cannot be overlooked any longer.

As a means of determining the opinions of parents within the province of Newfoundland, this study explores various aspects of public expectations and satisfaction with the Newfoundland and Labrador kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) school system and determines whether there are differences in expectations and satisfaction between parents and non-parents. The Newfoundland and Labrador education system is currently undergoing a series of dramatic changes and educational reform is a common topic in nearly all of the province's communities. Given these times of reform, it will be interesting to determine how satisfied the Newfoundland and Labrador public is with the education their children are receiving. This study focuses on expectations in such areas as school goals and priorities, school quality and curriculum. As well, issues such as problems facing schools and services for special needs students are addressed. In addition, the degree to which parents and non-parents are satisfied that these expectations are being adequately met are determined.

The introduction begins with an overview of the role of evaluations in early educational research. The development of the stakeholder approach is then discussed, explaining how evaluations moved from an individual focus to the inclusion of other groups having an interest in the process or outcome of the evaluation. Finally, the role of stakeholders in recent educational research is discussed in a review of recent literature.

Early Educational Evaluation

In the late 1970's, the National Institute of Education (NIE) in the United States developed an evaluation approach which it named the stakeholder approach. This approach attempted to involve in a program evaluation, those groups who actually played a role in the program (Bryk, 1983). This was a novel concept to the area of educational evaluation. Initially, the term "educational evaluation" had referred only to measuring differences among individuals. The evaluation was seen to have one purpose, to determine *individual differences in such things as subject matter content*. There was little focus on program or curriculum evaluation, mainly because there was no drive for accountability at that time (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Therefore, stakeholders were hardly of interest to evaluators.

Ralph Tyler (1950) was the first, in educational evaluation, to use evaluation as a means of refining curriculum and programs. At the time evaluations had typically

been used to compare students' performance against testing norms. This notion of using evaluations for more than individual assessments was reinforced by Cronbach (1963). He argued that evaluations should focus on the decision makers and the decision making process *behind the development of new courses and programs more* than on the actual courses themselves.

After Tyler and Cronbach criticized the traditional evaluation models, there came a wave of reassessments in terms of what should be included in an evaluation and what the key focus of any educational evaluation should be. Different schools of thought emerged and from these, various types of evaluation approaches or models evolved *including the responsive model* (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). It is in this model that we first see an approach which makes as its primary focus the concerns and issues of stakeholders.

In Stake's (1975) responsive model, it is the interests of various outside groups which Stake referred to as "stakeholding audiences" that serve as the primary organizer of the evaluation. The evaluator is less concerned with the goals of the program than with the effects the program may have "in relation to the interests of relevant publics" or stakeholding audiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p.24). Stake notes that an evaluator should know those people that are involved with the program and know their interests. He preferred to think of ways that the evaluation could "perform a service and be useful to specific persons" (Stake, 1975, p.13). According to Stake, the responsive

model is one that "...trades off some measurement precision in order to increase the usefulness of the findings to persons in and around the program" (p.14). He felt that the purpose being served by the evaluation should depend on the needs of the stakeholders involved in that evaluation. If one adopted this model, it would be necessary to conduct conversations or interviews with anybody who has a vested interest in the evaluation. In the case of an educational evaluation then, it may be necessary to interview program sponsors, program staff, students, parents, administrators, etc. The concerns identified through these interviews would be the means of organizing the evaluation. In fact, once the evaluation is complete, it may be necessary to prepare different reports for the different audiences, addressing their specific concerns. This reflects the fact that the responsive model recognizes that there may be several different points of view from audiences and this may even lead to conflicting viewpoints. Therefore, different stakeholders will have different information needs (Stake, 1975).

The Development of the Stakeholder Approach

Despite the wave of new evaluation models that were introduced prior to and around the time of Stake's responsive model, evaluations in general were still being widely criticized on numerous aspects. Weiss (1983) outlined several charges that had been laid against the more traditional evaluation models. She noted that many

evaluations were criticized for being very narrow in scope, dealing with issues which were only of concern to the program people. Program users and indirect contributors rarely had an opportunity to have their concerns addressed and often did not share the viewpoints of those people who were more directly responsible for the program. Still others thought that the answers and solutions provided by evaluations were hollow since they did not focus on the genuine concerns of most people (Weiss, 1983). It was also argued that evaluations were designed to address the concerns of top-line program officials and sponsors, not those people who conducted or used the program.

Taken together, these criticisms caused some people to question the merit of conducting evaluations. It was concerns such as these that served as the catalyst for the development of NIE's stakeholder approach. A key concern of NIE was to make evaluations "accessible and important to users and responsive to their needs while maintaining sufficient technical quality" (Cousins & Earl, 1992, p.399). The stakeholder model addressed this concern by encouraging the use of data at the local (or program) level. *The distinguishing feature of this approach was that it attempted to enhance the relevance of results and reduce political interference (in evaluations) by allowing all possible interested parties to be involved in the planning of the evaluation* (Cousins & Earl 1992). NIE thought that by involving those people who had a vested interest in the program (i.e., stakeholders), the program evaluation would become more meaningful and useful to all parties.

The Role of Parents in Educational Research

As noted earlier, research examining the attitudes of parents in terms of overall schooling is lacking. Most studies seem to focus on parents' views of very specific aspects of schooling without determining parents' attitudes toward the education system in general. There are two reasons for this lack of research. Until recently, parents have not been included in the decision-making process regarding educational matters. As well, most work in this area has been conducted under the auspices of government agencies or departments and therefore, may not have been published.

The following section provides an overview of studies conducted in this area and discusses their findings. A review of all available studies in the area was carried out and a sample of recent research is provided below. The studies discussed are representative of the research previously conducted in the area of parental attitudes (e.g., Fisher, 1985; Bernstein & Martin, 1992; and Saint-Laurent & Fournier, 1993). The first three studies focus on parental attitudes toward very specific aspects of education such as *homework*, *regular vs. special education programs*, *the mathematics curriculum*, etc. The remaining three deal with more general topics such as the relationship between parental involvement or parental choice and attitudes toward education.

Yanok and Derubertis (1989) conducted a comparative study in the midwestern United States which assessed the level of parental participation in both regular and

special education programs. According to the authors, a new government act provided parents of special education students the opportunity to participate in educational decisions that directly affected their children. Since there was no comparable legislation for parents of mainstream students, the authors anticipated that parents of special education students were more likely to have favourable attitudes toward both the quality of instruction and the equality of opportunity within schools. A questionnaire was administered which asked parents' opinions on three issues: school involvement; quality of instruction; and, equality of educational opportunity. In reference to school involvement, both groups of parents expressed satisfaction with their levels of participation in educational decision making. However, parents of exceptional children reported being contacted by their child's teacher more often than parents of mainstream children. When asked about the quality of education, both groups of parents seemed to be satisfied with the instruction in the schools. Finally, on the issues of opportunities, both parental groups were satisfied that the schools provided children equivalent opportunities to learn. Therefore, it appeared that parents of special education and mainstream students were equally satisfied with both the quality of instruction and the equality of opportunity within their children's schools. However, the parent sample sizes selected by Yanok and Derubertis leave room for concern. A total of 1702 parents agreed to participate fully in the study. Within this sample 1539 subjects were parents of mainstream students and the remaining 163 were

parents of special education students. These sample sizes are vastly different and the authors provide no breakdown of each sample in terms of ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status. It is difficult to make comparisons using these two samples without knowing what other characteristics may differentiate the two groups.

In 1991, Reetz conducted a survey which assessed parental attitudes toward another aspect of schooling, homework. The survey was administered to 570 parents of fifth grade students in South Dakota. The majority of parents thought a little too much homework was being assigned to their children. Approximately 39 minutes of homework was assigned to students on a daily basis. However, most parents thought an average of 34 minutes of homework a night was adequate. Parents also expressed some problems with their own ability to help children with homework. The biggest problems related to the establishment of study routines (i.e., consistent study times, independent study habits, parents finding time to supervise homework and, helping the child develop a positive attitude toward studying). Reetz suggested that schools should *spend more time providing parents with the guidance and support necessary to help* students with homework. As noted by Reetz, this could be accomplished through Parent-Teacher Organization programs, homework resource books or through suggestions at regularly held conferences.

Reetz (1991) generalized her findings to all parents even though there was an obvious discrepancy in the amount of homework assigned as reported by mothers and

fathers. Fathers reported that the actual amount of homework assigned was around 33.8 mins, an amount consistent with what they thought should be assigned (32.6 mins). Mothers however, reported that 38.84 mins of homework was assigned nightly and preferred to see 34.58 mins assigned. Therefore, there seems to be a problem with the subjective nature of parents' reports. Given that 70% of the questionnaires were completed by mothers, the study is more reflective of mothers's attitudes toward homework than the attitudes of parents in general.

A third study focusing on parental attitudes toward a specific aspect of schooling was conducted by the United States Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1993). That report discussed parental satisfaction with schools and the need for standards. According to the report, parents expressed satisfaction (based on the 1988 data for the National Education Longitudinal Study) with their children's achievement and with local schools despite evidence from a national mathematics assessment that student achievement was low. The authors explained that parents may have no external standards by which to judge their children's performance. Parents often judge their children's performance against other pupils' performance or against classroom standards. If a child's report card indicates that he or she has an 'A' grade in mathematics, the parent assumes the child is at the top of his/her class or is mastering the concepts required. However, when judged against national standards the child's performance and more generally, the school's performance may not be

acceptable. The authors argue that parents are often not aware of external standards and therefore, believe their children are performing at acceptable levels. As a result, many parents remain satisfied with their local schools, unaware of their schools' performance at a national level. This study however, uses only mathematics achievement as an index of student performance. It is possible that students are performing well in other curriculum areas or that parents are basing their satisfaction levels on a wide range of school characteristics. Parents for instance, may be satisfied with their local school because of the atmosphere it provides or because of its communication policies. The study assumes that parents' satisfaction with schools is determined by the academic achievement of the students alone.

Research has also focused on broader concepts such as parental involvement or parental choice in education and has sought more general attitudes from parents. In 1989, Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee examined the effects of a school improvement program on students', teachers' and parents' perceptions of school and classroom climate. They also looked at the effects of the program on student achievement and attendance. The parent program consisted of involving parents of an inner-city school system in a range of school activities. During the first level of participation, parents were involved in such things as the Spring Musical Program, the School Carnival, Family Night, etc. During the second level of participation, parents became active in the on-going life of the school participating in such things as playground, lunchroom

and library duties as well as planning fund-raising activities. Finally, a third level of participation had selected parents involved in school governance by serving on the School Advisory Committee (consisting of parents, teachers and other staff). This committee met monthly to monitor the school's progress toward achieving its goals and objectives. For the schools in which the program was implemented, children's, teachers' and parents' perceptions of classroom climate showed a significant positive change. For the control schools, there was no change in either children's or teachers' perceptions and there was a significant negative change in parents' perceptions of classroom climate. The authors concluded that the climate of schools is enhanced when parents are included in the planning and organizing of school activities.

The Haynes et al. (1989) study provides no evidence to conclude that this enhancement of climate will persist over time. The parent program was implemented in two phases, experimental schools entered the study in the first year and control schools entered in the second year. Pretest data was collected at the beginning of the school year and posttest data was collected at the end of the school year. It is possible that mere participation in a program, not the actual program itself, led to the changes in perceptions. In order to determine if parental involvement leads to long-term changes in school climate, a study would have to be conducted over several years, collecting pre- and post-test data for each year.

Ogawa and Dutton (1994) studied the concept of educational choice and parental

attitudes. Educational choice is related to the question of who should have control over schools in order for them to become more effective. Some feel that parents should have limited involvement in school decisions whereas choice advocates believe that parents should have the freedom to choose the schools their children attend and have more involvement in selecting school programs for their children. Ogawa and Dutton (1994) described four types of educational choice school programs that had been proposed as policy tools to improve education and reviewed research to support the options. These educational choice programs offered parents more options in selecting either their child's school or program of studies. Some choice programs even offered parents more control over such things as school policies and practices. Ogawa and Dutton discussed five assumptions which they thought were common to all the choice programs and searched the literature to see if the assumptions were supported. The five assumptions noted by Ogawa and Dutton (1994, p.276) were:

1. When given the opportunity, parents will make informed choices in selecting schools for their children based on the assessment of their children's interests and educational needs and the capacity of schools to engage their children's interests and meet their needs.
2. Schools, acting as largely autonomous units, will respond to parents' preferences.
3. The major participants in the educational enterprise--students, teachers, and parents--will be more highly motivated.
4. Parental choice will improve educational outcomes. Student's academic performance will be enhanced, and parent's satisfaction with schools will improve.
5. Parental choice will reduce the costs of providing educational services. The authors found little evidence in the literature to support any of the

assumptions. At best, the findings were mixed. However, they did draw some general conclusions. For the most part, better-educated parents, regardless of income level, who were actively engaged in but dissatisfied with their children's schools were likely to choose alternative schools. As well, parents who were already motivated to engage in school-related activities were more likely to make educational choices. These parents had certain standards or expectations and were more likely to choose alternatives in order to ensure that their expectations were being met. As the authors note in their conclusions, there are mixed results in the educational choice research. They also note that the issue of educational choice is often a political one centering around who should have control over schools' decisions, parents and teachers or central government authorities. Therefore, the research conducted in this area needs to be reviewed with scrutiny and caution in order to ensure the results are objective and not politically influenced.

Finally, a study by Okagaki and Sternberg (1993) also examined parental attitudes in relation to the more general issue of parental involvement. Okagaki and Sternberg assessed the attitudes of 359 immigrant and American parents of kindergarten through grade 2 children. Specifically, they assessed parental attitudes toward child rearing, education, and intelligence. In addition, the authors looked at relationships between parental beliefs and children's school performance. In their literature review, they noted research to support the claim that differences in cultural

values will lead to specific differences in parental beliefs. These previous studies showed that parents have different beliefs about the ages at which children can be expected to perform certain tasks, the traits or values that should be developed in their children, the ways they can affect their children's development and, their expectations for their children's schooling.

Through their own study, the authors found that social skills goals were rated as more important than academic goals by Filipino and Vietnamese parents. The primary difference between American-born parents and immigrant parents was that American parents believed it was more important to teach academic thinking skills (i.e., how to ask questions, how to be creative) than it was to teach conformity skills such as printing and writing neatly and clearly. In contrast, all the immigrant parents rated learning to do work neatly and orderly as being at least as important as, if not more important than learning basic facts, developing problem solving skills and developing creativity.

The authors also collected teacher ratings of children's performance. It was found that parental beliefs about conformity were negatively related to children's basic skills (as measured by the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills) and learning abilities (measured by the Sternberg Triarchic Abilities Test). Therefore, it seems that parents' culture plays an important role in influencing the expectations that parents have with regard to their children's schooling. The authors did not however, consider the role

that language or ethnic background may have on the performance of children with immigrant parents. It is possible that these children score lower on the standardized tests than children of American parents because the tests are developed for English speaking, American cultured children. Therefore, the lower performance may not necessarily be related to parents' conformity beliefs but may be related to the difficulty of these children to learn in an American system.

The above studies on parental attitudes toward education are typical of most research recently conducted in the area in that it tends to focus on attitudes toward discrete aspects of education or schooling. There is very little research in the literature which looks at parental satisfaction with the overall school system. Johnson and Immerwahr (1995) did conduct a study which focused on the American expectations for the public school system. Further reference is made to that study later in this paper. However, more closely linked to the current study, was one survey, conducted across several countries, which looked at the public's expectations and satisfaction in reference to their current school systems. In 1995, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) designed a survey which was aimed at determining public expectations toward the final year of compulsory education. The survey was administered to the general public in 12 countries (Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, England, Scotland, the United States, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Sweden, and Portugal). Since this study is unique in its comprehensive

assessment of attitudes toward the education system and since it is most directly related to the present study, it will be discussed in some detail.

The OECD Study

The OECD has been involved in developing a comprehensive set of educational indicators for the past several years. These indices provide a measurement standard of how well the system is performing across a range of areas. At first, the OECD set of indicators consisted of indices of educational process, outcome and context. However, those key people involved with developing the indicator set thought that it would not be complete without providing some indication of what people wanted from the educational system. Expectations, it was argued, can not easily be separated from the previous measures of process, outcomes or context. Measures of expectations are related to context because they reflect the general setting in which the system operates. The expectations and attitudes of the past no doubt have influenced the current system. Attitudes and expectations are also related to the process of education which basically, is an interaction between the inside and outside members of the school system (OECD, 1995). The expectations and attitudes of one group will have an effect on the other. Finally, attitudes and expectations may be construed as an outcome since they are a result of both previous and current happenings within the system.

Many of the OECD member countries thought it was also important to include

some measure of satisfaction for the immediate or direct clients of the schools such as parents and students. It was thought that these measures of satisfaction should focus on whether or not clients' expectations for the system were being fulfilled. In addition, it was recognized that other less direct clients of the system often have a significant influence. These clients include employers and the general public.

After discussing the need for satisfaction indicators with policy makers in several countries, it was decided that there was a need to develop a set of indicators based on the views of the general public. This target group was chosen mostly for pragmatic reasons. A survey of the general public would not be disruptive to schools; it could be conducted relatively quickly in all member countries; policy makers indicated an interest in the views of the public and, most countries already had existing surveys that could help provide a set of questions.ⁱ

Based on the existing surveys in the member countries, an item bank of possible questions was composed. After examining these items, several central themes became apparent. All countries were found to have certain common educational concerns. It was decided that the OECD survey would focus on five areas of common concern (1995, p.23). They were:

- (1) the expectations of, and satisfaction with the school's priority goals
- (2) the expectations of, and satisfaction with the curriculum
- (3) attitudes to locus of decision-making in schools
- (4) expectations of the role of the school and the home in personal/social education
- (5) perceptions of teacher status and morale

A pilot of the final questionnaire was administered in three countries, the Netherlands, Belgium and Finland. The final survey (entitled "Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education") was then conducted in the 12 member countries.

Respondents in the OECD study were asked to identify what they thought were the most important academic areas. Language (language spoken at school), mathematics, foreign languages and information technology came out on top. However, only 55% of respondents rated themselves as being either 'very' or 'fairly confident' that Information Technology was being taught well in schools. The other three academic areas received 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' ratings from 65% - 85% of respondents.

Respondents were also asked their opinions regarding the types of personal qualities that students should develop through their schooling experiences.

Respondents rated the following four qualities as the most important:

- self-confidence.
- skills and knowledge which will help in getting a job.
- the ability to live among people from different backgrounds, and
- skills and knowledge which will help with continuing studies or training.

When asked how confident they were that schools were having a major effect in terms of developing these qualities, most respondents did not give high confidence ratings.

In fact, only one of these qualities (knowledge and skills which will help with continuing studies or training) received a strong confidence rating with 65% of

respondents stating they were either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' that this quality was being developed. The other qualities received strong confidence ratings from less than 50% of respondents.

Although there has been an increasing amount of research in the area of parental attitudes toward education, no study has been conducted which assesses parental attitudes to the degree that the OECD study assessed the attitudes of the general public. As noted earlier, in the past, education officials rarely sought parental opinions when embarking on new policies or reforms. However, in recent years there has been a general move towards accountability in all service sectors including education. This move has seen more recognition given to the opinions of all interested parties not only those who are directly involved with the service. As a result, parents are insisting upon and achieving a more active role in the schools and in their children's education (Reynolds & Gill, 1994). Therefore, there is a need for research which focuses on parents' attitudes toward the present education system. *If parents are to have a more active role than in the past, there is a need to know just what they expect from the system and if they are satisfied with current practices and policies.* One way of determining parental attitudes is to use a survey approach. This thesis focuses on parents as a key group of stakeholders within the education system. Through a survey approach, parents' attitudes toward the grade school system (kindergarten through high school) were determined. This was done by assessing their expectations for that system

and the degree to which they were satisfied that these expectations were being met.

Many of the questions that were asked in the OECD study were included in the present study (with some modification). Therefore, it will be interesting to compare the results from both studies in order to see if respondents have similar satisfaction levels on comparable issues.

This Study

As noted by Reynolds and Gill (1994), parents are demanding more input into their children's education than ever before. In many provinces, parent councils consisting of school staff, parents and representatives from the community are being organized. Some of these councils have strictly advisory roles but others have been given authority over such things as hiring and firing staff, setting curriculae and establishing school rules and policies (Galt, 1995). It is therefore, extremely important to know the degree to which the system is supported and to which it has the confidence of this group of stakeholders. If stakeholders lack confidence in the system then it will be difficult to meet the system's desired goals. Parents who do not support a school's decision to implement a new physical education program for example, may be less likely to enroll their children in physical education classes. In order to provide students with the best education possible, it is necessary for all stakeholder groups including teachers, students and parents, to work together as partners. Without

parental support, education suffers.

As became evident in the OECD study, many people believe that the main goal of grade school should be to provide students with a basic understanding of core academic areas such as mathematics, science and english. In fact, recently there has been some public debate as to whether schools should return to teaching only the basic academic material as they had for years focussing only on reading, writing and arithmetic and the 'hard' sciences. Some people feel that by teaching students in areas such as economics, law, statistics, arts and drama, students aren't getting enough instruction in the basic areas and perform poorly in the workplace and in postsecondary studies. There are also others who feel that schools should be focussing more on developing moral, ethical and spiritual values. It is possible that parents' levels of satisfaction will be related to what they feel is the main purpose of schooling and whether they feel that purpose is being met. In 1995, Johnson and Immerwahr sought Americans' opinions when they asked Americans what they thought students should be learning in today's schools and found that:

for a large majority of Americans, too many public schools are not meeting their most elemental goal: ensuring that the nation's children master some basic, but essential skills - the ability to read and write English and to do simple arithmetic by hand, along with a 'common knowledge' understanding of science, history, and geography. [p.4]

This survey of Newfoundland and Labrador parents and non-parents determined whether or not they shared the attitudes of the American public. In order to determine parents' views on the current education system, it was necessary to ask questions on issues which are of importance to this group. For this reason, it was important that parents had an opportunity to identify the areas they thought needed to be addressed during the initial stages of developing a survey. What researchers deem to be areas of importance may differ from the issues that the target group believes should be addressed.

The questionnaire for the present study was designed by the Newfoundland Department of Education for the purpose of surveying the general public. However, a large subset of parents were surveyed as part of the general population allowing a comparison group of parents and non-parents. In an attempt to ensure that the concerns of both the public and parents were addressed, a working group was organized to design the survey. The group included members representing various stakeholder groups within the education system. Representation from a parent-teacher association, the Newfoundland Teachers Association, the University's Faculty of Education, the K-12 section of the Department of Education (DOE), the management of the Research Division of the DOE and, education researchers in general was sought. With the exception of the Newfoundland Teachers Association, all groups contributed to the development of a questionnaire on education, providing input into the current

key issues within the K-12 education system.² The author participated in this project as primary researcher and was therefore, directly involved in all aspects of the questionnaire design and administration as well as aspects of the data entry and data analysis.

Method

In order to determine parents' expectations and satisfaction levels with the Newfoundland and Labrador K-12 school system, a telephone survey was developed and administered within the province of Newfoundland. A telephone survey was chosen since it provided access to an adequate number of respondents without limiting the researchers to a particular geographic region. The size of the sample and a method of randomly choosing telephone numbers avoided the problems associated with balancing factors such as gender, age, annual income and occupation.

There are however, certain problems associated with a telephone survey. As is the case with many telephone directories, the compact disc directory used, Canada Home Phone (Pro-CD), only provided access to listed numbers. Therefore, those individuals with unlisted numbers are not included in the sample and as a result, did not have an opportunity to respond to the survey. As well, according to Statistics Canada (1995), 96.9% of Newfoundland households have telephones. However, this statistic varies across income groups. When considering the household income group of \$15 000 or less, only 90.9% of households have telephones whereas, approximately 98% of households having an income of \$25 000-\$35 000 have telephones. Therefore, a certain percentage of the population is not included in the sample and the poor may be under-represented. This group may have concerns about the education system that

are quite different from those people who fall into higher income groups, especially on issues such as accessibility and funding.

Another concern is related to the characteristics of the sample population. Most people who agree to answer a telephone survey probably do so because they have an interest in the topic area and want their views expressed. Therefore, people who have stronger opinions on the education system are more likely to respond. However, this type of bias is possible in all surveys where participation is voluntary and since education is a topic which concerns nearly all individuals, most people do express some level of interest in the area. The response rate for the survey was approximately 41%³. Given that the surveys were conducted during the hectic Christmas and New Year season, response rates were probably lower than would be expected at other times throughout the year. Many people expressed an interest in the survey but refused to participate because they were too busy.

Sample

Respondents' phone numbers were chosen from a computer generated list of Newfoundland and Labrador residential numbers. A CD-Rom computer package (Canada Home Phone) provided a listing of 10 million Canadian residential numbers from which the sub-population of Newfoundland and Labrador numbers was selected. A computer program (using the SAS statistical package) was designed to assign random

numbers to each Newfoundland residential listing. A sample of 3500 phone numbers was selected by programming the computer to select the listings which had been assigned the random numbers 1-3500. A sample size of approximately 600 completed surveys was required in order for the sample proportion to be accurate within 4 percent of the true population given a 95% confidence level. A sample size of 850 was chosen so that analyses could be conducted on subgroups (e.g., parents, males, females) while maintaining an acceptable level of confidence and margin of error. It should be noted however, that this sample was not large enough to provide comparisons across ethnic groups. Approximately 95% of the sample were of Canadian descent. Eight hundred forty six subjects over the age of 18 years actually responded to the telephone survey. An additional 35 subjects (over 18 years) were surveyed as part of a pilot test. However, the data for these respondents were not included in the final analyses.

Questionnaire Development

A working group which consisted of stakeholder representation from various groups (as noted in the introduction), was responsible for generating a list of possible items to be included in the survey on K-12 education⁴. Items were generated in several ways. A review of recent survey questionnaires in the area of attitudes toward education was conducted (McEwen's 1996 review of recent opinion surveys failed to identify many additional surveys). From this search, many possible questionnaire

items were collected (Omnifacts, 1994; OECD, 1995; Bulcock, 1994; Williams & Millanoff, 1990; Elam, 1990; Elam, Rose & Gallop, 1994; Livingstone, Hart & Davie, 1994). As well, most members of the working group had specific concerns which they thought should be addressed and formulated these concerns into possible questions. Finally, the working group was urged to discuss the project with colleagues and other interested parties as a means of identifying more issues or areas of concern. Therefore, feedback and comments from people outside of the working group also produced several of the items contained in the questionnaire.

Once a questionnaire framework and sample items had been constructed, it was reviewed by all working group members as well as other individuals within the education field⁵. This prompted revisions to questions that appeared too long, confusing or unclear. After several revisions, the questions were put in a survey format and a trial telephone interview was conducted with three individuals from the Department of Education participating as mock respondents. These trial runs prompted *more revisions since many items were deemed unclear and the total length of the questionnaire was criticized*. Once the revisions were completed, a draft version of the questionnaire was forwarded to project committee members across the country. Based on the feedback obtained from this group, a final draft of the questionnaire was prepared.

Using the procedure outlined above, a sample of random telephone numbers

was generated for the purpose of conducting a pilot test of the questionnaire. Based on comments and feedback obtained from 35 pilot surveys and the interviewers, final revisions were made. Although attempts had been made to reduce the length of the interview, many people still thought that it was too long. As a result, some questions were dropped from the pilot version. The final questionnaire averaged 15-20 minutes in length.

Procedure

A group of university Business Administration students were trained by the primary researcher to conduct the telephone interviews. During the training session topics such as the project background, purpose of the survey, and telephone manners were reviewed. Each survey question was reviewed, outlining the intent of the question and possible ways of rephrasing the question or probing the respondent to obtain accurate information. As well, interviewers were required to conduct mock telephone interviews *with each other before attempting an actual survey*.

All surveys were conducted between the hours of 4:30 - 9:30pm Monday through Friday and 11:00am - 3:00pm on Saturdays. Interviewers were provided with a list of telephone numbers each evening and were asked to dial each number and record whether: (a) a survey was completed, (b) the line was non-residential, (c) there was no answer, or (d) they were asked to call back. If there was no answer, the

number was redialled up to three times with an average of 24 hours between the first and the third call. If the interviewer was asked to call back at another time, an attempt was made to arrange a specific time to return the call. When telephone contact was made, the interviewer identified him or herself and asked to speak with someone who was 18 years of age or older. If more than one person in the household was over the age of 18, the interviewer asked to speak with the person over the age of 18, who had the most recent birthday. Once a suitable respondent was available, the interviewer continued with the introductory comments and the questionnaire (refer to Appendix A). When the interview was completed, the interviewer thanked the respondent for their time and their assistance and asked if there were any additional comments or if they had any questions. If, at any time throughout the interview, the respondent indicated that he/she would like to end the call, the interviewer explained how much time was remaining in the interview and asked if they would like to continue. If the answer was no, the interviewer asked if the respondent would mind taking 1-2 minutes to answer a couple of demographic questions before completing the call.

A common question asked at the beginning of the interviews related to the amount of time required to complete the survey. Respondents were told that the interview would take approximately 15 minutes but that the length would vary depending on the respondents' answers. Respondents were not pressured in any way to complete the survey and were reminded that all answers would be kept confidential.

Questionnaire Content

Although the survey covered a broad range of educational issues, many questions were organized around common themes or topic areas (refer to Appendix A). The initial questions were filter questions to determine whether the respondent was a parent of school aged or preschool children. Since one section of the survey was intended for parents only, it was important for interviewers to identify the respondent as either a parent or non-parent.

The next group of questions asked respondents to consider what they thought should be some of the main purposes and functions of schools. These questions focussed on school priorities, curriculum and the development of student qualities such as self-confidence and citizenship skills.

The third section of the survey addressed what people thought should be the responsibilities or principles of schools. Questions focussed on issues such as guidance or assistance for students, school discipline, homework and school-parent communication. As well, respondents were asked questions which dealt with some of the barriers to a high quality education such as problems facing today's schools and equal opportunities for different groups of students.

Since Canadian provinces are not governed by one set of school regulations, researchers thought it was important to ask respondents whether they believed there should be different provincial standards for Canadian school children. This topic is

addressed in one question which focuses on two standards-related issues: graduation requirements and provincial examinations. Other questions deal with organizational issues such as the length of the school year and whether the kindergarten program should be a full or half day program. Finally, several questions asked for respondents' opinions on such things as teacher salaries, public respect for teachers and the quality of schooling in the province.

As noted earlier, parents were asked to complete one extra section on the survey. This section focussed on parents' satisfaction with various aspects of their children's schools such as courses offered and teacher effectiveness. The parent section also included questions for parents with special needs students.

Results

Analyses were conducted to determine if certain factors could be used as predictors of respondents' overall satisfaction with the school system in general. This involved grouping some questions together and categorizing respondents by their parental status in order to assess which factors best predict a person's general satisfaction with the system. As well, trends and conceptual themes across clusters of questions were examined to determine their relationship with expectations and satisfaction.

Several questions in the survey refer to a person's satisfaction with various global aspects of the school system. These questions were first analysed to determine if they could provide one overall measure of satisfaction with the system. Further analyses were then conducted on other specific questions to see which factors are able to predict a respondent's overall satisfaction. These factors include: parental status, the main priority of schooling, *the biggest problem facing schools*, academic areas, development of student qualities, standards and equity issues, and various demographic variables.

Respondents

Eight hundred forty-six people responded to the survey. Respondents were

categorized into three parental status groups, those people who had never had children (283), those people who were parents of children currently in school (329) and those people who were parents of postschool-aged children or children who have left the school system (228). Six people identified themselves as being parents of preschool-aged children. Since there were only 6 respondents in this last category, they were dropped from all analyses. Table 1 gives a demographic breakdown of the three remaining groups.

There are clear age differences among the parental status groups, $\chi^2_{(2)} = 698.74, p < .025$. As shown in Table 1, a large percentage of respondents who did not have children in school (42.2%) were between the ages of 18 to 24 years. This compares to 2.1% and 1.3% of respondents who either currently had children in school or were parents of postschool aged children respectively. A majority (55.4%) of respondents who currently had children in school were between the ages of 35 to 44 years. However, only 14.2% of nonparents and 8.4% of respondents with postschool-aged children fell in the same age category. Finally, a large percentage of respondents who were parents of postschool-aged children were between the ages of 45 to 54 years while only 3.9% of nonparents and 16.5% of respondents with children currently in school fell into this age category.

Table 1: Demographic comparison of three groups of respondents.

	Percentage of respondents by Parental Status		
Demographic Variable	Never a Parent (n = 283)	Parent of Postschool (n = 228)	Current Parent (n = 329)
Age			
18-24	42.2	1.3*	2.1
25-34	34.8	2.7	23.9
35-44	14.2	8.4	55.4
45-54	3.9	36.9	16.5
55-64	3.9	28.9	2.1
65+	1.1	21.8	0.0
Education			
Elementary	2.1	15.9	5.2
Some High School	8.9	34.4	17.6
High School	24.8	20.7	28.7
Some Postsecondary	28.7	13.2	15.4
College Diploma	13.5	8.4	15.1
University Degree	18.8	6.2	15.7
Graduate Studies	3.2	0.4	1.9
Annual Income			
Less than 20 000	28.0	26.4	18.4
20-29 000	18.3	26.8	19.0
30-39 000	16.1	12.7	16.2
40-39 000	10.0	7.7	15.9
50-59 000	5.7	6.4	10.6
More than 60 000	15.8	9.1	16.8
Gender			
Male	42.2	34.7	34.8
Female	57.8	65.3	65.2

*It is unlikely that respondents in this age category would have children who had already left the school system. It is possible that these parents misunderstood the term 'currently' when asked if their children were currently attending school.

Levels of education also varied across the three groups. $\chi^2_{(4)} = 130.28$, $p < .01$. Given the trend in recent years to acquire higher levels of education, it is not surprising that a large number (64.2%) of younger respondents (Never a Parent) had at least some postsecondary education or had completed postsecondary studies. Only 48.1% of people who currently had children in school and 28.2% of those parents of postschool-aged children had the same level of education. From the opposite perspective, 50.3% of older respondents (i.e., those parents of postschool-aged children) indicated having completed less than high school compared to 22.8% of respondents with children currently in school and 11.0% of respondents who never had children.

Although there was a significant relationship between income level and parental status, $\chi^2_{(12)} = 45.51$, $p < .01$, there were no consistent differences across the three groups. That is, it cannot be said that one group of respondents had a higher or lower income level than either of the other two groups. Most respondents reported an income level of less than \$39,000 (62.4% of nonparents, 53.6% of respondents with children currently in school and 65.9% of parents with postschool-aged children).

Predicting overall satisfaction

Several of the questionnaire items are aimed at determining an individual's overall level of satisfaction with the school system in general. In particular the three

questions discussed below asked respondents about general levels of satisfaction. Table 2 presents a descriptive analysis of the responses to questions 19, 20a, 20b and 21.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis for questions 19, 20a, 20b and 21.

<i>Question (with codes)</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
Question #19		2.16	0.94
Very confident (1)	212		
Somewhat confident (2)	320		
Doubtful (3)	175		
Not at all confident (4)	83		
Question #20a		2.01	0.75
A (1)	181		
B (2)	450		
C (3)	135		
D (4)	15		
FAIL (5)	7		
Question #20b		2.31	0.86
A (1)	107		
B (2)	396		
C (3)	215		
D (4)	37		
FAIL (5)	19		
Question #21		1.60	0.80
Better (1)	480		
The same (2)	158		
Worse (3)	160		

19. *How confident are you that schools in your province are as good as schools in the rest of the country?*

(a) *Very confident*

(c) *Doubtful*

(b) *Somewhat confident*

(d) *Not at all confident*

20. *Students are often given grades of A, B, C, D or FAIL to indicate the quality of their work. If you were to grade the overall quality of the schools in your province, would you give them an A, B, C, D or FAIL?*
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|------|
| a. Primary/Elementary schools | A | B | C | D | FAIL |
| b. High schools | A | B | C | D | FAIL |
21. *How do you think schooling in your province today compares to what it was ten years ago? Would you say it is...*
1. Better
 2. The same
 3. Worse

Approximately 67% of those surveyed were either *very* or *somewhat confident* that schools in Newfoundland were as good as those in the rest of the country. A chi-square test found respondent's answers were not dependent on parental status, $\chi^2_{(n)} = 9.60$, $p = .14$.

For question 20, responses were coded from 1 through 5 with 1 being equal to 'A' and 5 being equal to 'FAIL'. An analysis of the data from this question shows that respondents graded primary/elementary schools higher, $\bar{x} = 2.01$, in quality than high schools, $\bar{x} = 2.31$, $p < .01$. Primary/Elementary schools were given either a grade of 'A' or 'B' by 80.1% of respondents whereas 65% of respondents gave the same grades to high schools. Again however, these grades were not dependent on parental status, $\chi^2_{(8)} \text{ quality A} = 13.35$, $p = .10$; $\chi^2_{(5)} \text{ quality B} = 11.26$, $p = .19$.

The majority of respondents (60.2%) believed that schooling is better today than it was ten years ago. Approximately 20% of respondents thought it was the same as ten years ago and another 20% thought it was worse. A chi-square analysis indicated

that there was no significant relationship between parental status and the views that respondents had on today's schooling. $\chi^2_{(4)} = 6.15$, $p = .19$.

Table 3: Reliability analysis of items comprising total satisfaction score.

Question	Mean (if item deleted)	Variance (if item deleted)	Correlation (corrected item total)	Alpha: (if item deleted)
grading primary/ elementary schools	6.088	3.569	0.545	0.547
grading high schools	5.786	3.257	0.534	0.541
provincial schools as good as others	5.921	3.187	0.466	0.594
schooling compared to ten years ago	6.499	4.108	0.281	0.703

N=705 cases

Alpha (total) = .6682

Given that the four questions noted above all appear to be measuring a person's level of satisfaction with the system overall, reliability analyses were conducted to determine if these questions were indeed measuring similar concepts. If each of the questions provide an indication of a respondent's overall satisfaction then the responses to the items could be combined so that one measure of total satisfaction is calculated for each respondent. Therefore, a Cronbach's alpha score was obtained for questions 19, 20(a), 20(b) and 21 (Table 3). Although an alpha level of .6682 was obtained, it was

found that by deleting the last question from the analysis (#21), this alpha level increased to .7028. As a result, this final measure was removed and the other three measures were used to find an overall level of satisfaction for each respondent. The alpha level confirmed that the questions were measuring similar concepts and that the responses to these questions could be combined. Therefore, each respondent was assigned a total standardized score for overall satisfaction. Actual scores ranged from 2.52 to 3.00, $\bar{x} = 2.87$, $\sigma = .1353$. Using this total satisfaction score, questions were analysed to determine which items could be used as indicators or predictors of a person's overall satisfaction.

Demographic Variables

Several socio-demographic variables including age, annual income, education and gender were tested to determine if there was any relationship between these variables and the total satisfaction score. Analyses of variances indicated that only one of these demographic variables, education, was significantly related to a person's overall satisfaction, $F_{(2,21)} = 3.63$, $p < .01$. Post hoc Tukey analyses determined that there were significant differences between those respondents who had elementary school education only and those respondents who had either some postsecondary education, $p < .05$, or a university degree, $p < .025$. Those respondents who had elementary school only tended to be more satisfied overall than the other two classes of

respondents. However, there was no significant difference between the overall satisfaction level of those respondents with elementary education only and those respondents that had completed a college diploma.

Parental status

An analysis of variance and post hoc comparisons were conducted to determine whether parental status was related to a person's overall level of satisfaction using the total satisfaction score. The analysis determined that parental status is significantly related to overall satisfaction, $F_{(2,129)} = 5.41$, $p < .025$. Further post hoc Tukey analyses revealed that respondents who never had a child in school were less satisfied, $\bar{x}_{\text{never}} = 2.89$, with the system than both those respondents who currently had children in school, $\bar{x}_{\text{current}} = 2.85$, $p < .025$, and those parents of postschool-aged children, $\bar{x}_{\text{postschool}} = 2.85$, $p < .025$.

Main purpose of schooling

Respondents were given four common purposes of schooling and were asked to rank these purposes from most important to least important. The survey question read as follows:

5. *I am going to read you four purposes of schooling. Could you please tell me which of the following you feel is the most important purpose?*
 - a) *Developing a broad base of knowledge in subjects such as math, science and language arts.*

- b) Developing moral, spiritual and ethical values.*
- c) Developing personal and social skills such as confidence, self-discipline and cooperation.*
- d) Developing specific job-related skills such as technical, vocational and trade skills.*

Overall, the majority of respondents (50.6%) thought that developing a broad base of knowledge in core subject areas was the most important purpose of schooling. Another 20.4% of respondents thought that developing specific job-related skills was the most important purpose while 17.8% thought the main purpose was developing moral spiritual and ethical values and only 11.3% of respondents thought it was developing personal and social skills.

Table 4: Respondents' rankings of purposes of schooling.

	Mean Ranking by Purpose ^a			
	Broad Base	Moral Develop.	Social Develop.	Job Skills
Gender				
Male	1.94	3.07	2.47	2.51
Female	1.76	2.91	2.56	2.74
Parental Status				
Never a parent	1.84	3.09	2.35	2.72
Children in school	1.67	2.99	2.54	2.79
Children finished school	2.06	2.78	2.75	2.37

^a Purposes were ranked from 1 to 4 with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least important.

It was found that a respondent's choice for the number one purpose of schooling was dependent on their parental status, $F_{(1, 146)} = 4.83$, $p < .025$. As shown in Table 4, significant differences in rankings were also found when rankings by males and females were compared, $F_{(1, 146)} = 5.75$, $p < .025$.

Gender was significantly related to a respondent's ranking in all purpose areas except for developing social skills. Females ranked developing a broad base of knowledge, $F_{(1, 146)} = 6.12$, $p < .025$, and developing moral values, $F_{(1, 146)} = 4.35$, $p < .05$, as being more important than did males. Males however, ranked developing specific job-related skills more importantly than did females, $F_{(1, 146)} = 8.16$, $p < .01$.

Parental status was found to be a significant factor in ranking importance within all purpose areas. Post hoc comparisons revealed that for the broad base purpose area, those respondents who never had children in school and those parents with children currently attending school ranked this purpose as more important than did those parents of postschool-aged children, $p < .05$ and $p < .01$, respectively. Within the area of moral development, there was only a significant difference between those respondents who never had children in school and those with postschool-aged children, $p < .01$. Within the area of developing social skills, comparisons across all parental groups were significant. Those respondents who never had children in school ranked this purpose higher in importance than did either those parents with children in school, $p < .05$, or those parents with postschool-aged children, $p < .01$. As well, those parents with

children in school ranked this purpose higher in importance than did parents of postschool-aged children, $p < .05$. Finally, within the area of developing specific job-related skills, those parents of postschool-aged children gave higher rankings than those respondents who never had children in school, $p < .01$, and those parents with children in school, $p < .01$.

Confidence that main purpose is being met

Respondents were also asked to indicate how confident they were that the purpose they identified as being the main purpose was being met (Table 5). For instance, if a person regarded 'developing moral, spiritual and ethical values' as the main purpose of schooling, then analyses were conducted to determine how confident that person was that this main purpose was being met. Question 6 read as follows:

6. *How confident are you that schools are meeting your top priority which was... (repeat most important purpose from #5)*

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>a) Very confident</i> | <i>c) Doubtful</i> |
| <i>b) Somewhat confident</i> | <i>d) Not at all confident</i> |

Responses were coded from 1 through 4 with 1 being equal to *very confident*, and 4 being equal to *not at all confident*. Overall, more than 56% of parents were *somewhat confident* that their main priority of schooling was being achieved. An additional 20% of respondents stated they were *very confident* that schools were meeting their main priority.

An analysis of variance showed that there was a significant relationship between respondents' confidence that their top priority was being met and the main purpose of schooling they had chosen, $F_{(3, 114)} = 3.33$, $p < .025$. Post hoc Tukey comparisons revealed that people who chose a broad base of knowledge in a range of academic subjects as the main purpose of schooling were more confident ($z = 2.01$) that this purpose was being met than those respondents who chose developing specific job-related skills ($z = 2.21$) as the main purpose, $p < .05$. Further post hoc analyses showed that there were no significant differences in confidence levels across other purpose areas.

Table 5. Respondent's confidence that the main priorities of schooling are being met.

#1 Purpose	Confidence that purpose is being met (% respondents)						Total
	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Doubtful	Not at all confident	z	SD	
Broad Base n=432	23.2	58.6	12.4	5.8	2.01	0.77	100%
Moral Develop. n=93	16.9	55.1	18	10.1	2.21	0.85	100%
Social Develop. n=152	16.4	62.1	17.9	3.6	2.09	0.70	100%
Job Skills n=169	20	48.1	23.1	8.8	2.21	0.86	100%

Again, further analyses were conducted on this data to determine if the degree of confidence that a respondent had in terms of purposes being met was related to the importance ranking that a respondent assigned to a given purpose. For instance, did respondents who ranked 'developing moral, spiritual and ethical values' higher in importance feel more confident that this priority was being met? ANOVAs were conducted for each purpose area in order to determine whether a person's confidence was related to the importance ranking (i.e., *essential* or *very important*, *somewhat important*, *not at all important*) they assigned to a given purpose area. The results were significant only for the confidence by broad base importance ranking, $F_{3, 114} = 2.77, p < .05$. That is, the confidence respondent's had that developing a broad base of knowledge in certain subject areas was dependent on how important they ranked that purpose of schooling. Respondents who ranked developing a broad base of knowledge higher in importance were also more confident that this priority was being met.

Additional analyses were carried out to determine the relationship between a respondent's choice for the main purpose of schooling and their overall satisfaction with the system. An analysis of variance indicated that there was no significant relationship between a person's overall satisfaction and their chosen main purpose of schooling. A second analysis of variance was then conducted to determine if there was a relationship between a respondent's confidence that their main priority of schooling was being met and their overall level of satisfaction with the school system. The

results, $F_{1, 501} = 37.60$ were significant at the $p < .01$ level. The findings show that respondents who are confident that their main priority of schooling is being met also tend to be more satisfied overall than other respondents. Thus, a person's degree of satisfaction is not as much related to their perceived main purpose of schooling as it is related to whether they feel that purpose is being met.

Biggest problem facing schools

Question 10 was an open ended question which asked respondents to indicate what they perceived to be the biggest problem facing schools today. Each response was number coded so that frequencies could be conducted. Three main problems were noted most frequently. A large number of respondents (28.6%) thought that discipline was the biggest problem facing schools (refer to Table 6). The other two most noted problems were drugs (11.4%) and classroom instruction/teacher training (11.3%).

Overall (i.e., across all problems) when respondents were asked to state how confident they were that schools were dealing with the main problem, answers varied. Responses were coded from 1 through 4 with 1 being equal to *very confident*, and 4 being equal to *not at all confident*. Approximately one third of parents (33.8%) stated they were *somewhat confident* and another 37.0% said they were *doubtful* that schools were dealing with the problem. However, an analysis of variance revealed that there was a significant relationship between the problem identified by respondents and their

level of confidence that this problem was being dealt with. $F_{(2,97.98)} = 3.41, p < .01$. When considering those respondents who noted discipline as the biggest problem, most respondents (61.7%) indicated being either *doubtful* or *not at all confident*. Confidence ratings were somewhat higher for those respondents who thought that drugs were a major problem in schools. However, 52.3% still stated that they were either *doubtful* or *not at all confident*. Finally, the third most noted problem was classroom instruction/ teacher training. As well, for that problem, most respondents (73.5%) felt *doubtful* or *not at all confident* that the problem was being dealt with. Post hoc Tukey analyses however, showed that the differences in confidence ratings across problem areas were not significant. That is, those respondents who thought that discipline, for example, was the main problem were no more or less confident that this problem was being dealt with than were those respondents that had identified some other problem.

The question of the biggest problem facing schools was also analysed with respect to gender and parental status. A chi-square analysis revealed that females tended to be more confident than males that the main problem of schooling was being dealt with appropriately, $\chi^2_{(3)} = 14.14, p < .01$. Gender analyses were then conducted for each of the top three identified problems. When looking specifically at the top three identified problems, it was found that there were no significant relationships between gender and a respondent's confidence that either of these three problems was being dealt with.

Chi-square tests of independence were conducted to determine if there was a relationship between respondent's confidence that the three main problems were being dealt with appropriately and the three parental status groups. For the problem of discipline, it was found that respondent's confidence that discipline was being dealt with was dependent on their parental status. $F_{(2, 240)} = 5.28, p < .025$. Further post hoc Tukey comparisons on the data for the discipline problem indicated that respondents who were parents of school-aged children were more confident, $\bar{x} = 2.51, p < .05$, than other respondents.

Table 6: Biggest problem facing today's schools and the confidence parents have that this problem is being dealt with appropriately.

Problem (% of respondents identifying this as main problem)	Confidence schools are dealing with this problem (% respondents within problem area)					
	Very Confident	Somewhat confident	Doubtful	Not at all confident	\bar{x}	SD
Discipline (28.6%)	7.2	31.1	38.3	23.4	2.67	1.03
Drugs (11.4%)	7.0	40.7	33.7	18.6	2.61	0.91
Classroom instruction (11.3%)	3.6	22.9	38.6	34.9	2.94	1.01

When looking only at the data for those respondents who identified 'drugs' as being the biggest problem, there was no significant relationship between confidence that the problem was being dealt with and parental status. $\chi^2_{.05} = 5.07$, $p = .54$. Finally, there was also no significant relationship between respondent's confidence with the classroom instruction problem and parental status. $\chi^2_{.05} = 3.10$, $p = .80$.

The data from this question was also analysed to determine whether or not respondent's confidence that their main priority of schooling (as discussed earlier) was being met related to their confidence that the main problem in schools was being dealt with appropriately. A significant positive correlation between these two variables may reflect a respondent's overall confidence in the school system. A bivariate correlation indicated a significant relationship between a respondent's confidence that their main priority of schooling is being met and their confidence that the biggest problem facing schools is being appropriately dealt with, $\rho = .254$, $p < .01$. This shows that respondents who felt confident that their main priority of schooling was being met also tended to be confident that the biggest problem facing schools was being dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Additional analyses were then conducted to determine whether this finding reflected a person's overall satisfaction with the school system. An analysis of variance was conducted to determine if there was a relationship between a person's overall level of satisfaction and their confidence that the biggest problem facing schools was being

dealt with appropriately, $F_{(3, 424)} = 10.93$, $p < .01$. A significant relationship was found. Therefore, respondents who are confident that school problems are being dealt with tend to be more satisfied.

Academic areas/Student qualities

The same method of reliability analysis as described above was used to assess whether other questions in the survey were related to respondents' overall satisfaction. In particular, the two questions which asked people their views on academic subject areas and the development of student qualities were analysed to determine if these issues affected a person's overall level of satisfaction with the school system. Many people identified 'developing a broad base of knowledge in subjects such as mathematics, science and language arts as being the most important purpose of schooling. However, it was unclear whether they thought these were the most important subject areas or whether they believed that developing a broad base of knowledge across a wide range of subjects was important. Therefore, analyses were conducted to determine whether respondents thought certain academic courses as well as student qualities were more important than others.

Question seven asked respondents to rate how important certain academic courses were and how confident they were that these courses were receiving enough attention. Similarly, question eight asked subjects to rate the importance of developing

certain student qualities and how confident they were that these qualities were being developed. Since these questions ask respondents to rate a variety of subjects and student qualities, it was thought that the set of academic course questions would be conceptually related as would the set of student quality questions. A Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the internal reliability of the four clusters of questions: importance of courses ($\alpha = .6712$), confidence courses are receiving enough attention ($\alpha = .8419$), importance of student qualities ($\alpha = .8448$) and confidence that student qualities are being developed ($\alpha = .8701$). The analyses showed that by removing any of the measures within each question, the alpha levels would be reduced therefore, all course areas and student qualities were included in the total measure. Given the high levels of internal reliability for each of the four concepts, total scores were calculated for each respondent. As described earlier in the procedure used to calculate a total satisfaction score, respondents' scores on each of the four concepts were summed and a total score was obtained for course importance, confidence courses are receiving adequate attention, importance of student qualities and, confidence that student qualities are being developed. A respondent's score for course importance for example, now indicated how important the respondent thought academic courses were in general. There were no longer separate importance scores for each of the courses listed.

A stepwise regression analysis was then conducted to determine the relationship between the total course and student quality scores and a person's total satisfaction

score. All first order correlations were significant. That is, there was a significant relationship between respondents' total satisfaction score and each of the four other total scores calculated for the academic course and student quality questions. However, the regression analysis (Table 7) determined that respondent's confidence that courses are receiving enough attention accounted for the most variance, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .132$, in determining a person's total satisfaction, $F_{(1, 107)} = 107.19$, $p < .01$, demonstrating that this question alone is a good indicator of a person's overall satisfaction. Adding the total score for respondents confidence that student qualities were being developed, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .020$, produced an F value of 63.18, $p < .01$. The importance scores for both academic courses and student qualities were not included in the stepwise regression model since they did not add a significant R^2_{change} . These last two questions therefore, do not add much in terms of determining a stronger indicator for a person's level of satisfaction with the school system in general.

Table 7: Regression analysis.

Predictor	R ²	R ² change	F change	Significance
Total course confidence	0.132	0.132	107.19	.01
Total quality confidence	0.152	0.02	16.78	.01

Standards

When asked how important it is that high school graduation requirements be the same in every province, a large majority (67.5%) of respondents felt that it was *essential*. Another 28.1% stated it was *fairly important* to have standard graduation requirements. Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of basing students' grades at the end of high school on provincial examinations. Up to the time that this survey was administered, Newfoundland was one of the few provinces that had maintained a system of provincial examinations throughout the past few decades. Students were required to write provincial examinations in most of the senior level courses required for high school graduation. Over 44% of respondents rated provincial examinations as being *essential* and another 41.6% rated them as being *fairly important*. When combining these results, a total of 85.6% of respondents thought it was important for students to write provincial examinations⁹.

The standards data were also analysed to determine if demographic variables including gender, age, education, annual income and parental status were related to respondents' attitudes on these issues. An analysis of variance revealed there was no significant relationship between respondent's gender, age or level of education and the level of importance they placed on the two standards issues. However, annual income was significantly related to the importance that respondent's placed on having a system of provincial exams. $F_{(3, 742)} = 2.21, p < .05$. In general, those people with lower

annual incomes ranked provincial exams more importantly than did those people with higher annual incomes. Post hoc comparisons did not reveal any significant differences between specific annual income groups.

The results for the parental status analysis are shown in Table 8. The analysis of variance revealed there was no significant relationship between parental status and the importance rating respondents gave to graduation requirements being the same in every province, $F_{(2,819)} = .05$, $p = .95$. However, an analysis of variance did show that the importance rating given to the question of student's grades at the end of high school being based on provincial exams was dependent on a respondent's parental status, $F_{(2,414)} = 7.70$, $p < .01$. Further analyses and post hoc Tukey comparisons indicated that those respondents who are currently parents of school-aged children and those respondents who are parents of postschool-aged children were more likely to rate this as being important ($\bar{x} = 1.65$, $p < .025$, and $\bar{x} = 1.70$, $p < .01$, respectively) than those respondents who never had children in school, $\bar{x} = 1.91$.

Finally, the standards data was analysed to determine if respondents' opinions on these issues affected their level of overall satisfaction. It was found that there was no significant relationship between a person's attitude toward the issue of graduation requirements being the same in every province and their overall satisfaction with the system, $F_{(3,717)} = 1.76$, $p = .15$. However, there was a significant relationship between the issues of provincial examinations and overall satisfaction, $F_{(3,714)} = 5.76$.

$p < .01$. Those respondents who thought that provincial examinations were essential tended to be more satisfied with the system, $\bar{x} = 2.06$, than those respondents who thought that provincial examinations were not at all important, $\bar{x} = 2.45$, $p < .01$.

Table 8: Responses to issues of standards (percentages).

Standard	Parental Status										
	Never a Parent				Parent of Postschool				Current Parent		
	E	FI	FU	NI	E	FI	FU	NI	E	FI	NI
standard provincial graduation requirements	66.9	29.5	2.5	1.1	67.7	27.4	2.7	2.2	67.9	27.4	3.1
final grades based on provincial examinations	37.1	43.9	10.1	9	43.3	47	6	3.7	52.2	36.1	6.2

E = Essential, FI = Fairly Important, FU = Fairly Unimportant, NI = Not at all Important

Equality issues

In addition to issues of standards, respondents were asked a series of equality questions and were asked to state how confident they were that specific groups of students were receiving equal opportunities in our province's schools (Table 9).

Although parental status was not significantly related to a person's level of confidence on each of the equity issues, further analysis on this data shows that specific demographic variables are related to a person's level of confidence on each of these issues. Approximately 66% of those surveyed were *very confident* that males and females have equal opportunities. Gender was a marginally significant factor in determining a person's level of confidence that opportunities for males and females were equal. $\chi^2_{1,1} = 7.13$, $p = .07$. More men (71.5%) than women (63%) indicated being *very confident* that male and female students had equal educational opportunities.

Table 9: Responses to issues of equality (percentages).

Equality Issue	Very Confident	Somewhat Confident	Doubtful	Not at all Confident
males/females	66.5	26.1	4.9	2.6
low income/high income	40.2	24.8	24.0	11.0
disabled/non-disabled	28.9	35.4	26.1	9.5
all cultural backgrounds	49.8	33.7	12.7	3.7

An analysis of variance indicated that a person's confidence that males and females have equal opportunities does affect their overall level of satisfaction in the system, $F_{(3,146)} = 8.99, p < .01$. Those people who were *very confident* tended to be more satisfied, $\bar{x} = 2.85$, than those who indicated being either *somewhat confident*, $\bar{x} = 2.90, p < .01$, or *doubtful*, $\bar{x} = 2.92, p < .025$.

When comparing the opportunities of low and high income students, 40% were *very confident* that they had equal opportunities. However responses to this question varied widely. While 24.8% of respondents were *somewhat confident* that students from different income categories had equal education opportunities, a comparable 24.0% of respondents said they were *doubtful* that these two groups had equal opportunities. An analysis of variance was conducted for the income question to determine if respondents' annual income was related to their confidence that students from different income classes had equal opportunities. The results showed that annual income was not significantly related to a respondent's confidence level, $F_{(3,63)} = 1.07, p = .38$.

Again, an analysis of variance was performed to determine if respondents' views on this equity issue were related to their overall satisfaction. The findings show that respondents' confidence in whether students with high and low income backgrounds have equal opportunities is significantly related to their satisfaction with the school system in general, $F_{(3,223)} = 9.90, p < .01$. Post hoc comparisons indicated

that those respondents who were *very confident* were more satisfied, $\bar{x} = 2.83$, than those respondents who were *doubtful*, $\bar{x} = 2.89$, $p < .01$, and those respondents who said they were *not at all confident*, $\bar{x} = 2.89$, $p < .025$.

Approximately 29% of people surveyed were *very confident* that students with disabilities had educational opportunities equal to those not having disabilities. Another 35% said they were *somewhat confident* of this. However, an additional 26.1% said they were *doubtful*. An analysis of variance on the data for the disability question showed there was no significant relationship between a child's disability status (i.e., whether respondents had children requiring special needs) and respondents' confidence that students with disabilities had educational opportunities equal to those of students without disabilities, $F_{(1,346)} = 1.30$, $p = .25$. This analysis is based on a small sample however, given that of the respondents who currently have children in school, only 44 parents identified themselves as having special needs children. The sample is therefore, not large enough to adequately represent their views.

As with the other equity issues, an analysis of variance was performed to determine if respondents' attitudes on this issue were related to their overall satisfaction. A significant relationship was found, $F_{(1,346)} = 14.68$, $p < .01$. Those people who were *very confident* tended to be more satisfied, $\bar{x} = 2.82$, than those who indicated being either *somewhat confident*, $\bar{x} = 2.88$, $p < .01$, *doubtful*, $\bar{x} = 2.90$, $p < .01$, or *not at all confident*, $\bar{x} = 2.89$, $p < .01$.

Finally, a large percentage of those surveyed (50%) felt confident that students from all racial and cultural backgrounds have equal educational opportunities. However, this finding could be biased given that 95% of respondents identified themselves as being Canadian descent. Therefore, since no significant numbers of minority groups were identified, it cannot be certain that minority groups would share the view that all racial and cultural groups have equal opportunity. As well, since there was little representation from other cultural groups, analysis could not be conducted to determine if this demographic factor was related to overall satisfaction.

Discussion

When the OECD member countries first discussed including expectations and satisfaction in their set of educational indicators, it was argued that these measures should focus on whether or not clients' expectations for the system were being fulfilled. The measures were intended to determine a level of satisfaction for the general public. Given the increasing demand of parents and the public to have more input into their children's education (Reynolds and Giff, 1994), it has become increasingly important to know the degree to which these stakeholders are confident that the system is able to meet their needs. In order to understand satisfaction with the schools, there has to be clear information on what the public wants (i.e., expectations) the schools to provide. This study examined parental satisfaction with the overall education system. Rather than focussing on particular aspects of education and schooling, it provides an in-depth look at which areas of the system parents are satisfied with and which areas they feel need improvement. Therefore, it is possible to get a general level of satisfaction from respondents by taking into account their views on a variety of issues and concerns. Studies which focus on one area of schooling only, cannot provide an indication of parents' overall attitude.

By looking at a host of educational issues as identified by key stakeholders within the school system, this study was able to show that a person's overall

satisfaction with the system is clearly linked to whether they think their expectations surrounding certain areas and issues are being fulfilled. It was also shown that more general demographic factors such as parental status, age, income, and gender had little influence on respondents' satisfaction with the school system. While level of education does appear to be linked to levels of satisfaction, most predictors of satisfaction were more attitudinal in nature than demographic. These predictors included, whether respondents thought the main purpose of schooling was being achieved, whether they were confident that academic areas were receiving enough attention, whether they thought the main problems facing schools were being adequately dealt with and, whether they were confident that all groups of students had equal educational opportunities.

As was found in the 1995 Johnson and Immerwahr study, the majority of respondents in this study thought that developing a broad base of knowledge in core subject areas was the most important purpose of schooling. Furthermore, this view was not dependent on parental status. Across three parental status groups, there was a definite expectation that the schools should teach students the basic elements of mathematics, science, language and other essential skills.

In recent years, there has been some public debate between educators, parents and the general public regarding school curriculums. Some argue that students are not getting enough skills in the core subject areas of mathematics, english and science.

Others have argued that students need a more rounded education that includes instruction in subjects such as the arts, physical education, home economics, etc. In the present study, respondents were asked to rate how important various academic subjects were and whether they thought those subjects were receiving enough attention in today's schools. The analyses showed that across subject areas, respondents did not distinguish one subject as being more important than the others. Respondents who rated mathematics or language as being important for example, also tended to rate the other subjects as being important. It could be concluded therefore, that respondents thought it was important to teach a wide range of subject areas in today's schools and that no one academic area was significantly more important than another. In other words, parents' expectations for the school system were high and they expected their children to receive a broad based education.

As noted, the findings show that the majority of respondents thought that the most important purpose of schooling was to develop a broad base of knowledge in subjects such as mathematics, science and language arts. However, since respondents who rated one subject area as being important also tended to rate all other subject areas as being important, this study provides no clear distinction as to what respondents thought constituted core subject areas. It seems in fact, that 'core' is very broad in the minds of parents.

The opinions of respondents in the OECD (1995) study were slightly different

from those of respondents in the current study. Respondents of the OECD study thought that language, mathematics, foreign languages and information technology (IT) were the most important academic areas. The OECD survey was conducted only a little more than a year before the present survey was conducted so it is unlikely that the timing of the two surveys is related to these differences in views between the respondents. However, the majority of the countries that took part in the OECD study were European countries and it is quite possible that cultural differences are an important factor in explaining the discrepancies in the findings of the two studies. The only country which might have comparable data to Canada would be the United States.

The OECD study did provide some data and some analyses by country. When the United States data provided in the OECD study was examined it appeared that respondents from the United States rated the importance of foreign languages lower than respondents from most other countries, with the exception of respondents from the United Kingdom. In keeping with the data from the current study, United States respondents rated IT, the sciences and social subjects higher in importance than most other countries. However, comparable to findings from the other countries, United States respondents rated technical studies and the arts lower in importance than did respondents of the current study. Unfortunately, for this question, the OECD study collapsed the data for the *essential* and *very important* rankings and only provided combined percentages for these two categories of responses. Without the complete data

set and the sample sizes for each country, there is no way of determining the significance of these results. As well, the OECD study did not analyse this question by demographic variables such as age, gender or education, providing no indication as to whether these variables are related to respondents' answers.

In addition to giving their views on the importance of various academic subjects, respondents in the current study were asked to rate their confidence that these academic areas were receiving adequate attention in the schools. Respondents tended to have either widespread confidence that academic areas were getting adequate attention or else did not have much confidence overall. In other words, those respondents who tended to be confident that one or two subject areas were receiving adequate attention in the schools were also confident that all subject areas were getting enough attention showing again that this cluster of confidence questions was measuring a common concept.

These results are comparable to those found in the OECD study. Overall, OECD respondents were no more or no less confident that their main academic areas were receiving enough attention than the respondents of the current survey. While only 55% of those surveyed in the OECD study were either *very or fairly confident* that Information Technology was receiving enough attention, for the other three academic areas, a larger majority of respondents (65% - 85%) were either *very or fairly confident*.

Respondents in both the current study and the OECD study were asked their opinions regarding the types of personal and social qualities that students should develop through their schooling experiences. Respondents of the current survey did not rank any one quality or group of qualities as being any more important than the others. However, respondents of the OECD study ranked self-confidence, skills in getting a job, the ability to get along with people from different backgrounds and, skills to help with continuing education as being more important than the other presented qualities. As discussed in the section on the importance of academic areas, the differences in the two groups' responses are most likely related to cultural factors. As an example, Newfoundland students have little experience in dealing with people from different backgrounds given that the population is a very homogeneous one in terms of both racial and religious background. Therefore, this issue wouldn't be seen as one of great importance by the general population. Students attending schools in most of the countries included in the OECD study however, are likely exposed to many ethnic and religious groups on a daily basis and learning to co-habitate in such an environment would be very important quality to develop in the schools.

When asked to identify the main problem facing schools today, many respondents of the current study noted similar problems. The top three problems identified were; discipline, drugs and classroom instruction/teacher training. A large number of people did not think that these problems were being dealt with

appropriately. However, respondents felt somewhat more confident that the problem of drugs was being dealt with than the other two problems. This may be a reflection of the host of drug prevention and anti-drug education campaigns that have been promoted in the schools in recent years by the health and education departments. The media attention received by these programs had possibly reassured the public that the problem was being addressed.

For the problem of drugs in the schools, and the problem of classroom instruction, parental status was not shown to have any significant relationship with level of confidence. However, parental status was shown to have a relationship to respondents' level of confidence that the problem of discipline was being dealt with. Parents of school-aged children were more confident that the problem of discipline was being dealt with than other respondents. It is possible that respondents who have never had children in school or parents who have postschool-aged children are less likely to be aware of the day-to-day measures that schools are taking against this problem. This could be because they do not deal with the schools on a daily basis as do respondents who have children attending school. This suggests that a lack of contact with the schools or inadequate communication between the schools and the general public may lead to the public perception that problems in the schools are more serious than they actually are or that they are not being dealt with.

As noted, responses from the survey were analysed to determine if certain

factors were related to a person's overall level of satisfaction with the school system. This overall measure of satisfaction included indices such as confidence that Newfoundland schools are as good as other schools in the country and ratings of the quality of both primary/elementary schools and high schools. It was shown that respondents who were satisfied that their main priority of schooling was being met and respondents who were confident that academic subjects were receiving enough attention tended to be more satisfied with the school system overall. Respondents were generally confident about the system if they believed that the schools were providing, what they perceived to be, the main element of their children's education. Since the public is likely to have more confidence in a system that they think is addressing the fundamental needs of the students, it is important for educators and school administrators to solicit opinions from the public as to what it thinks these fundamental needs are.

Other factors were shown to influence a respondents' overall satisfaction with the system. Respondent's overall satisfaction was also related to their level of confidence that the main problem in schools was being dealt with. The more confident respondents were that the main problem was being dealt with, the more confident they tended to be with the school system overall. As well, whether respondents thought that academic subjects were receiving adequate attention in the classroom was a determinant of overall satisfaction. The more confident respondents were that subjects were getting

enough attention, the more satisfied they were overall. In addition, it was also shown that a person's confidence that certain groups of students (females, low income students, and disabled students) have equal educational opportunities as other students is reflected in that person's level of satisfaction with the system. Those people who are generally confident that these groups are not disadvantaged in the system tend to be more satisfied with system overall. Parental status however, was not shown to have any effect on a person's overall satisfaction with the school system. Those respondents who never had children in school were just as likely to be satisfied with the system as those respondents who currently had children attending school.

Within Canada, two systems of calculating a student's year end marks have generally been used. In one system, a student's year end grade is composed of the course marks the student has received throughout the year on projects, assignments, chapter tests, etc. In the other system, students' year end grades are based, at least partially, on their performance on a comprehensive provincial examination written at the end of the course. In the past few decades, provinces have moved back and forth between the two systems of grading. However, there has been a continuous debate as to which grading procedure is preferable. Given the controversy that exists around the topic of provincial examinations, the public was asked for its view on the topic. A large majority of respondents thought it was important that a student's final grade be partially based on provincial examinations. In particular, parents were more likely to

see this as being important than were nonparents. It was also shown that respondents in lower annual income categories were more likely to think it was important to have a system of provincial examinations than those in other income categories. Other demographic variables such as respondents' age, gender and education level were not factors in determining the importance rating that respondents gave to provincial examinations.

Given that there has been a system of provincial examinations in this province for many years, it is not surprising that most people thought it should be a necessary requirement for high school graduation. However, since this survey was conducted, the Newfoundland Department of Education eliminated provincial examinations. It would be interesting to survey the public again, now that the system has been removed, to determine whether they still think that provincial examinations are as important as they did at the time this survey was completed. It is also possible that people in other provinces, where the examination system has been less popular, may not feel the same need for such a system. In order to determine high school graduation standards that are acceptable across the entire country, it would be necessary to seek the opinion of respondents in all provinces.

This study shows that parents and nonparents have similar expectations as to what should be emphasized in today's schools and they also share one view in terms of how well schools are fulfilling their expectations. In general, most respondents were

satisfied with the performance of the Newfoundland school system. Their overall level of satisfaction was related to their satisfaction on issues such as: achieving the main priority of schooling, placing proper emphasis on course curricula and adequately dealing with daily problems facing the schools. Demographic variables such as age, gender and annual income did not relate to a person's overall level of satisfaction. However, education was an important factor. Respondents with an elementary level education were more satisfied with the system than those respondents who had either some postsecondary education or those respondents who had completed a university degree. This finding is not surprising since those people who have achieved higher levels of education are likely to have higher expectations of the school system and would be more aware of the problem areas they faced after going through the system. What is interesting however, is that there was no difference in the levels of overall satisfaction of those people with elementary education only and those people who had completed a technical college diploma (i.e., had not attended university). This suggests that pursuing a postsecondary education is not necessarily the key component in determining overall satisfaction with the system. If that were the case, those people with a college diploma should also be less satisfied with the system. However, there were also no significant differences between the satisfaction levels of those respondents who had a university education and those who had a technical college education so it also cannot be argued that the pursuit of a university education is the key component.

Unfortunately the data collected for this study does not allow itself to a more detailed analysis of this issue and it is a topic that future studies should explore further.

If this study were to be replicated or if a similar study was conducted to probe certain issues further, it would be important to recognize the lessons learned from the current study. One key lesson was the importance of timing the administration of the survey. Given that the present survey was conducted around the Christmas and New Year season, it was difficult to find people who were willing to take the time to answer the questions thus, resulting in a low response rate. Although, the population was oversampled so that the desired sample size was achieved, it is possible that response rates would have been higher if the survey had been conducted after the Christmas season had passed. This would have reduced both the time and expense of completing the survey.

The second critical lesson learned from this study related to the difficulty of carrying out an applied piece of research. As noted throughout this thesis, there is very little published research or theoretical work around the topic of public or parental satisfaction with the school system in general. The research that is published is very focussed and narrow in scope, dealing with specific educational issues. In undertaking such a broad topic as parental satisfaction with the school system, many issues and concerns were covered, making it difficult to streamline the analyses and to reveal common themes or findings within the data. Although it is important to determine an

overall level of parental satisfaction with the school system in general, future research in this area could provide more thorough analyses by exploring key issues, such as the one of satisfaction levels of university graduates noted above, in greater detail.

There are many groups of stakeholders within the educational system; parents are but one of these. Many other groups such as teachers, students and employers have a vested interest in the system and the importance of their views and attitudes should not be overlooked. As was suggested by OECD (1995), surveying the general public is just one step in determining the success of our school systems. In order to fully determine the degree to which the system is meeting the expectations of all stakeholders, the input of these other groups must be included in future studies.

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Appendix A

PAN-CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS PROGRAM: EXPECTATIONS
AND SATISFACTION

PUBLIC OPINION POLL ON THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

**Pan-Canadian Educational Indicators Program:
Expectations and Satisfaction**

Public Opinion Poll on the School System

(Introduction to the person answering the phone...

If the person answers in a language other than English, ask if they speak English or if they would prefer to continue in French then, continue with the introductory comments in the appropriate language.)

Hello, I'm _____ (State your first name). I'm calling on behalf of the Canadian Education Statistics Council. Would I be able to speak with someone in your household who is over the age of 18? (If there is more than one person over the age of 18, ask to speak with the person who has most recently had a birthday.)

(Introduction when beginning the actual interview...

Interviewer should ask which language is preferred

English *

French *

Repeat first sentence only if the interviewee is not the person who answered)

Hello, I'm _____ (State your first name). I'm calling on behalf of the Canadian Education Statistics Council.

We are conducting a poll on education in Canada. Would you be willing to take the time to answer some questions.

The questions I'm going to ask deal only with education issues from kindergarten up to the end of high school, that is the K-12 school system.

Your answers will help policy makers from across the country understand what the public and parents feel about education and what they would like to see happen in education. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

Background (Filter) Questions

The first few questions will give us some background about your relationship to the education system.

(The choice of 'No Response' is not to be read aloud)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>NR</u>
1. Have you ever had children in school? (If no, go to #4)	___	___	___
2. Are they currently attending school? (If no, go to next section)	___	___	___
3. Are your children in: a. Kindergarten to grade 6 b. Grade 7 to grade 12	___ ___	___ ___	___ ___
4. Do you have any children who are not yet in school?	___	___	___

The School System

The next several questions deal with specific issues of the school system, that is education up to the end of high school.

5. I am going to read you four purposes of schooling. Could you please tell me which of the following you feel is the most important purpose?
(Rotate order of responses)
- a. Developing a broad base of knowledge in subjects such as Math, Science and Language Arts.
 - b. Developing moral, spiritual and ethical values.
 - c. Developing personal and social skills such as confidence, self-discipline and cooperation.
 - d. Developing specific job-related skills such as technical, vocational and trade skills.
 - e. No Response ___

First choice ___

Of the remaining 3(2) choices which is the next most important? (Repeat choices)

Second ___ Third ___ Fourth ___

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

6. How confident are you that schools are meeting your top priority which was... (repeat most important response from #5).

Very confident	Somewhat confident	Doubtful	Not at all confident	No Response
1	2	3	4	5

7. The following are examples of things that young people can study in high schools.
(Only ask part B for those subjects that the respondent rates as being 'essential' [E] or 'fairly important' [FI].)

	A. In your view, how important are each of these?					B. How confident are you that schools give enough attention to those courses you thought were important?				
	E	FI	FU	NA	NR	VC	SC	D	NC	NR
The Arts (e.g. Art, Music, Drama)										
Computer Studies										
Language Arts (e.g. Language and Literature)										
Mathematics										
Moral Education/Religious Studies										
Physical Education										
The Sciences (e.g. Chemistry, Biology)										
Second Language										
Social Subjects (e.g. History, Geography)										
Technical/Vocational Studies										

E=Essential, FI=Fairly Important, FU=Fairly Unimportant, NA=Not At All Important, NR=No Response
VC=Very Confident, SC=Somewhat Confident, D=Doubtful, NC=Not At All Confident, NR=No Response

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

8. The following are qualities that young people may have developed by the end of high school.
(Ask Part B only for those items that respondents rated as essential [E] or fairly important [FI].)

Qualities	A. In your view, how important is it that schools emphasize these qualities?					B. How confident are you that schools give enough emphasis to those qualities you rated as important?				
	E	FI	FU	NA	NR	VC	SC	D	NC	NR
Self-confidence										
Teamwork and cooperation skills										
Communication skills										
The ability to live among people from different backgrounds										
A desire to continue with their education										
Skills and knowledge which will help in future studies or training										
A lifestyle which promotes good health										
Being a good citizen										
An ability to deal appropriately with social issues like sex, drugs and alcohol										

E=Essential, FI=Fairly Important, FU=Fairly Unimportant, NA=Not At All Important, NR=No Response
VC=Very Confident, SC=Somewhat Confident, D=Doubtful, NC=Not At All Confident, NR=No Response

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

9. The following questions seek your opinion on some other educational factors.
(Ask Part B only for those items that respondents rated as essential [E] or fairly important [FI].)

	A. In your opinion, how important is it that schools:					B. How confident are you that schools really do:				
	E	FI	FU	NA	NR	VC	SC	D	NC	NR
Provide career/guidance counseling										
Help students who have special learning difficulties										
Maintain discipline/orderly conduct										
Assign regular homework										
Offer a wide range of subjects										
Keep parents well informed and involved										
Emphasize high student achievement										

E=Essential, FI=Fairly Important, FU=Fairly Unimportant, NA=Not At All Important, NR=No Response
VC=Very Confident, SC=Somewhat Confident, D=Doubtful, NC=Not At All Confident, NR=No Response

10. What would you say is the biggest problem in schools today?

No Response _____

(Do not read list)

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Crime/Vandalism | f. <input type="checkbox"/> Low achievement |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline | g. <input type="checkbox"/> Parental interest |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking | h. <input type="checkbox"/> Student motivation/interest |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs | i. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher interest |
| e. <input type="checkbox"/> Overcrowding in schools | j. <input type="checkbox"/> Violence |

11. How confident are you that schools are dealing with this problem appropriately?

Very confident	Somewhat confident	Doubtful	Not at all confident	No Response
1	2	3	4	5

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

12. In your view, how important is it that:

	Essential	Fairly Important	Fairly Unimportant	Not at all Important	No Response
<i>graduation requirements for high school students be the same in every province</i>					
<i>students' grades at the end of high school be based, at least partially, on provincial/public examinations</i>					

13. Thinking about schools in your province, how confident are you that:

	Very Confident	Somewhat Confident	Doubtful	Not at all Confident	No Response
<i>male and female students have equal educational opportunities?</i>					
<i>students from low income families have the same educational opportunities as students from high income families</i>					
<i>students with disabilities have educational opportunities that are equal to students without disabilities</i>					
<i>students from all cultural and racial backgrounds have equal educational opportunities?</i>					

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

14. How satisfied are you with the following:

	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Somewhat Satisfied</i>	<i>Somewhat Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>No Response</i>
<i>the overall changes in the education system in recent years (past 5 years)</i>						
<i>the quality of teacher training in your province</i>						
<i>the provincial government's commitment to a high quality of education and training</i>						
<i>the level of funding for education in this province</i>						

15. Do you think the length of the school year is:

- a. About right
- b. Too long
- c. Too short (Go to #15b)
- d. Don't know
- e. No Response

- 15b. Should it be lengthened so that:

- a. there are more weeks of study
- b. the school days are longer
- c. both the number of weeks and the school days are lengthened
- d. Other _____
- e. No Response

16. Many kindergarten children are enrolled in half-day programs. Would you prefer to see a full-day or half-day kindergarten program?

- a. Half-day
- b. Full-day
- c. No Response

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

17. Do you feel that the salary paid to teachers is:

a. About right
b. Too high
c. Too low
d. Don't know
e. No Response

18. In your view, how much respect does the public have for teachers? That is, are they...

Very Respected	Somewhat Respected	Somewhat Disrespected	Not at all Respected	No Response
1	2	3	4	5

19. How confident are you that schools in your province are as good as schools in the rest of the country?

Very confident	Somewhat confident	Doubtful	Not at all confident	No Response
1	2	3	4	5

20. Students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, or FAIL to denote the quality of their work. If you were to grade the overall quality of the schools in your province, would you give them an A, B, C, D or FAIL?

a. Primary/Elementary schools	A	B	C	D	FAIL	NR
b. High schools	A	B	C	D	FAIL	NR

21. How do you think schooling in your province today compares to what it was ten years ago? Would you say it is...

Better___ The same___ Worse___ No Response___

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

For Parents Only

(Ask questions below only if the respondent is a parent of school aged children) Parent: Yes No

All of the questions I have asked you up to this point have been about schooling in general. Since you have indicated you are a parent of school age children, I would like to ask you a few more specific questions.

22. How satisfied are you with the information you receive from your child's (pluralize, if necessary) school about what he or she is expected to learn?

Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Response
1	2	3	4	5

23. How satisfied are you with the information you receive about how well your child is learning or performing in school?

Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Response
1	2	3	4	5

24. Would you give the school your child attends a grade of A, B, C, D, or FAIL in each of the following categories:

a. the school in general	A	B	C	D	FAIL	NR
b. the effectiveness of the teachers	A	B	C	D	FAIL	NR
c. the effectiveness of the principal	A	B	C	D	FAIL	NR
d. communication between parents and teachers	A	B	C	D	FAIL	NR
e. The courses/programs offered	A	B	C	D	FAIL	NR

25. Do you have a child who requires special services, enrolled in a school in this province (i.e., A child who has needs different from the majority of students)?

a. Yes (If yes, go to #26) b. No (If no, go to #28)
c. No Response

26. What type of special services are required? _____
(Do not read list)

a. ___ Behavioral modification	e. ___ Remedial Instruction
b. ___ Enhanced Instruction/Programming	f. ___ Visual impairment facilities
c. ___ Hearing impairment facilities	g. ___ Wheelchair access
d. ___ Medical services/care	h. ___ No Response

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

27. How satisfied are you that your child's special needs are being met?

Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	<i>No Response</i>
1	2	3	4	5

Provincial Option

(Questions specific to individual provinces)

Some provinces wished to have one or two questions which related to their own current educational issues. The following questions are asked for this reason.

28. Newfoundland has recently held a referendum on denominational education, were you satisfied with the outcome of that referendum?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure
4. *No Response*

29.

30.

31.

32.

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

Demographic Characteristics

- D1. How old are you? (If respondent prefers not to answer, ask the question referring to categories) *No Response*

In what age category do you belong?

NR

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| a. 18-24 | d. 45-54 |
| b. 25-34 | e. 55-64 |
| c. 35-44 | f. 65 + |

- D2. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Do not read responses)

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary school | e. <input type="checkbox"/> College diploma | NR |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Some high school | f. <input type="checkbox"/> University degree | |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma | g. <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate studies | |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> Some postsecondary | | |
| h. Other _____ | | |

- D3. If you have a spouse or partner, what is the highest level of education completed by your partner? (Do not read responses)

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary school | e. <input type="checkbox"/> College diploma | NR |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Some high school | f. <input type="checkbox"/> University degree | |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma | g. <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate studies | |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> Some postsecondary | h. <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable | |
| i. Other _____ | | |

- D4. What language is spoken most often in your home? _____ NR
(Do not read responses)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | e. <input type="checkbox"/> Inuktitut |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Cree | f. <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/> English | g. <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/> French | |

- D5. Which annual income group applies to your family?

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----|
| a. Less than \$20,000 | e. \$50,000 to \$59,000 | NR |
| b. \$20,000 to \$29,000 | f. \$60,000 or more | |
| c. \$30,000 to \$39,000 | g. Don't know (Do not read) | |
| d. \$40,000 to \$49,000 | | |

Expectations and Satisfaction

Public Opinion Poll

- D6. In which of the following job categories do you belong? NR
- a. ☐ Postsecondary educator
 - b. ☐ K-12 educator
 - c. ☐ Government/Public servant
 - d. ☐ Private sector employer
 - e. ☐ Student
 - ☐ Postsecondary
 - ☐ Other
 - f. ☐ Unemployed
 - g. ☐ Other _____
- D7. Do you ever have occasion to hire students directly from the school system: NR
- a. ☐ on a regular basis
 - b. ☐ occasionally
 - c. ☐ never
- D8. What is your ethnic/cultural background? (Do not read responses) NR
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. American | 11. Inuit |
| 2. Black | 12. Italian |
| 3. Canadian | 13. Jewish |
| 4. Chinese | 14. Métis |
| 5. Dutch (Netherlands) | 15. Polish |
| 6. East Indian | 16. Scottish |
| 7. English | 17. Ukranian |
| 8. French | 18. West Indian |
| 9. German | 19. Other _____ |
| 10. Indian (North American) | |
- D9. Gender (Do Not Ask)
- 1. Male
 - 2. Female

*That concludes the poll unless you have a question you would like to ask.
Thank you very much for taking the time to answer our questions.*

Question or Comment

Endnotes

1. Many of the surveys conducted in the OECD member countries were internal government projects and have not been published or are unavailable to the public.
2. This questionnaire was developed and administered by the Newfoundland Department of Education under the auspices of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, as part of the Pan-Canadian Educational Indicators Program.
3. The response rate was calculated by dividing the number of surveys completed by the number of total calls (number of surveys completed + number of rejections). The total number of calls made does not include numbers at which there was no answer or numbers which were non-residential.
4. It was proposed that a series of focus groups be completed in several locations to provide researchers with some insight into concerns that parents may have with the present system and their level of satisfaction with certain practices and policies. However, due to the time and cost associated with conducting these focus groups, the funding body for the study rejected this proposal.
5. *The author extends a sincere thank you to all those who helped review and offer feedback on the questionnaire.* A special thank you to Dr. Lenora Perry Fagan, Helen Banfield, Dr. Robert Crocker, and Malcolm Grant.
6. Although there has been recent debate as to whether there should be a Newfoundland system of provincial examinations, at the time the survey was conducted, provincial examinations were being held annually in the province and the topic was not a controversial one.



